

Victor Datskevich

Multi-Coloured Fins





Betta splendens



Barbus spes (Odessa-Barbe)



Cichlasoma cyanoguttatum



Badis badis



Julidochromis ornatus



Carassius auratus auratus



Metynnis hypsauchen



Aphyosemion walkeri



Trichogaster trichopterus
spec. gold



Enneacanthus obesus



Trichogaster "cosby"



Pterophyllum eimekei



Barbus conchoni



Xiphophorus helleri



Lebistes reticulatus



Brachydanio rerio



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Fins

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There are houses and houses: wooden houses and brick ones, houses built of snow and houses built of concrete. But the house whose inhabitants you are going to meet today is all made of glass, with a glass floor and glass walls, no windows and no doors, and it is called an aquarium.



In it live different fish. There are big ones, bigger than your hand, and little ones, the size of a thumb nail. Most of them come from hot, tropical countries. It is not always easy to make out the fish when they are swimming free in the river, let alone observe how they live and multiply. Whereas in the aquarium, we can see everything and by watching the fish we can learn many interesting things about them: how they eat, how they deposit their roe and how they look after their young.

The Swordtail

The Swordtail has a long growth like a sword on its tail, which is how it got its name. It lives in small ponds in South America. If the pond dries out in summer, it gets to another



one across dry land. It coils up like a spring, uses its sword as a lever and does a little jump. It moves along like this in leaps until it comes to more water. When it is swimming, it uses its sword like a rudder, to steer. In the picture it has only one sword, but they sometimes have two, three, or even five.

Multi-Coloured Shoal

You don't know which way to look when you see a shoal of multi-coloured Guppies. Little and lively, they are always on the move. It took a lot of work on the part of



aquarium-lovers to breed such bright and pretty little fish. Even at home in South America the multi-coloured Guppy is something of a rarity. Back there it is grey, with much smaller fins. This is so as not to be noticed and scooped up by a bird, or swallowed by a bigger fish.

The Blackest Fish of All

There is nothing blacker than the Black Molly in the whole aquarium. Its little ones are also black and very lively. As soon as they are born they set off to look for food.



The Black Molly lives in rivers. But sometimes it is attacked by its enemies, tiny infusoria, and then it swims away to the sea.

The infusoria get killed off by the salt water, and the fish returns to the river.

The Golden Gourami

The Golden Gourami has long thin whiskers in place of breast-fins. When it finds something interesting, it puts out its whisk-



ers, as if they were hands, to feel what it is: the weeds, the glass walls and the little snails in the aquarium, and if it is another fish, the Golden Gourami pats it with its whiskers as though in greeting.

An Underwater Island

Look at this beautiful fish: it seems to have been sown with pearls. That is probably how it got its name: Pearl Gourami.

When it is time to breed, the Gourami builds a nest



by gathering up with its mouth the leaves and little twigs that float in the water and glueing them together with a froth made of air-bubbles. A little island is formed. The Gourami hides its roe inside it so that it shouldn't get washed away or eaten by other fish, then stands guard by the nest until the babies have bitten their way out of their eggs.

Fighting Fish

Fighting Fish come in all colours, bright red, blue or green, and they are called Fighting Fish because they are so aggressive. They cannot help fight-



ing. They attack and try to bite one another, tearing each other's fins to shreds. But this is no disaster, for the fins grow back again: the only thing that is seriously hurt is their pride before the other fish for looking so tattered.

The Glass Fish

This fish is so transparent that you can even see its skeleton. It is hard to make out this fish in the water, and in the weeds you cannot see it at all. A sharp-toothed enemy will swim past and be completely puzzled, for there is a floating



skeleton, but no fish to be seen! Deciding that this must be a fish that somebody else has already picked clean, the hunter simply swims past. And this is just what the Glass Fish has been waiting for, it ruffles out its fins, wags its tail and swims away to find a worm for its dinner. This is no easy task in the river, as opposed to the aquarium where live worms are fed in from above.

A Mysterious Fish

This is a mysterious fish. It lives in tropical countries, in shallow ponds and puddles. When the hot season comes, the puddles dry out and the fish



perish. But as soon as the rains come again, the fish reappear... It turns out that their roe can do without water for several months at the bottom of the pond, in the damp mud. And as soon as it rains, the roe is back in water and the young hatch out.

A Travelling Fish

This fish is called the Blue Gularis because of its bright colour. People often find them in the hollow of a tree. How on earth do they get there? With the help of birds. The birds wade in shallow puddles looking for



worms, the wet mud clings to their feet and in the mud is the roe of the Blue Gularis. When the bird has found its worm it flies off home to its hollow tree, where it cleans the clay off its feet. The roe comes off as well, and out hatch the young. People come out after the rain, find a puddle has formed in the hollow tree, and in the puddle Blue Gularis are swimming.

The Neon Tetra

These fish live in shoals in the smaller rivers of South America. The tropical forest is like a green roof over the river. The leaves are so thick that they do not let the sun's rays through,



and the water is black. The fish are used to living in darkness, and find each other with the help of the bright blue stripe on their bodies.

If a shaft of sunlight gets through, it lights up the water, and the stripe flashes like a neon sign on a city street at night. That is why this fish is called the Neon Tetra.

The Cardinal Tetra

This fish also has a neon stripe, but in addition its belly is bright red. If the sunlight falls on it, it



burns like a live coal or like a candle on a Christmas-tree. A whole shoal is a beautiful sight, shining and sparkling in the dark water like so many lights.

The Cat Fish

The Cat Fish lies on the sand at the bottom, resting, immobile but for its whiskers and its eyes, watching curiously everything around.

Since it is lying on the bottom, it means it is



not hungry. But when hungry, the Cat Fish rum-mages about in the sand looking for worms, bur-rowing under stones and bits of root, and raising a muddy cloud in the water.

The cloud gets so thick that you can't see the Cat Fish for it, only a shadow moving along the bottom.

The Diamond Fish

There are also Diamond Fish in my aquarium.

They fully deserve the name “Diamond”, for



they sparkle with all the colours of the rainbow just like diamonds.

Quick and lively, they dart about flashing as if a handful of jewels has been thrown into the water.

A Crown on His Tail

Aquarium-lovers are observant people. They noticed that this fish has a tail in the shape of a crown and called



it the Emperor Tetra. If you spot a shoal of these fish feeding in the shallow weeds, you will see only the tails, and so they will look like a group of people taking a walk, all wearing crowns.

Little, But So Quick and Lively

This pale-yellow fish with red eyes is very beautiful against a background of green weeds. It is the Lemon Tetra, only a little bigger than a halfpenny, but quick and lively.



Trying to catch it is no easy matter, for it knows its way perfectly in the underwater maze of weeds. If it were not so nimble, it would have a hard time of it at home in the river, for its larger enemies would soon eat it up. But this fish manages to survive and has come to grace our aquarium.

How Fish Rest

This Pretty Tetra has hidden under a bush, and is standing there immobile. It might be hiding from the sun, or perhaps it has had a fright, or maybe it is merely



resting. For fish do not go to sleep like we do: they simply stop swimming for a while. They choose a cosy, secluded spot, and stand still in it, like this Pretty Tetra who does not move so much as a fin. You might pass it by if it wasn't for its shining tail.

A Live Torpedo

All quiet in the water, not a fish to be seen. And suddenly a striped fish flashes up as though it were a torpedo. It has gone for food. As soon as it



catches sight of something to eat, it darts forward as though it had been fired from a catapult, in a little jerk, and advances in similar jerks until it gets to the food. But when it is full, it swims quietly among the water-weeds, only its fins fluttering.

The Congo Tetra

This fish comes from tropical Africa. In the River Congo, it had many enemies to escape from, so it became a fast swimmer. Now it has come to live in the aquar-



ium. It darts up and down like a little motor-boat, so fast that you cannot get a proper look at it until it stops for a rest. And if you want to catch it, you have to use a big net because it will slip out of a little one, spin off to the side, and be gone in a jiffy.

Help from the Rain

Everyone took a liking to the Harlequin Fish when it first arrived from Indonesia. But nobody managed to get it to breed in



captivity; the roe always perished before it hatched out. Then we tried breeding in rainwater—and it worked! The young fish hatched out of the eggs and grew into big ones, that was how people learnt to breed them.

The Queensland Rainbow

If you ever see a green weed decorated like a Christmas-tree in an aquarium, do not be surprised: it means that there are Queensland Rainbows in this aquarium. It is they who decorate the plants with transparent little



bubbles on delicate threads. But the bubbles are not toys or decorations, they are eggs.

The Queensland Rainbow is an inventive little fish: it hangs out its eggs and swims about admiring them. Soon it will have something to celebrate, when the young hatch out. But meanwhile the eggs hang there, swaying with every current and shining all the colours of the rainbow.

The Dandy of the Aquarium

The Dwarf Gourami is a very elegant fish. Its dark-blue breast looks like a shirt under a jacket, and the jacket itself is all red



and light-blue checks. It gets this beautiful colouring only when it is fully-grown and has learned to swim fast. When it is small, it is quite different: grey and plain, to make it more difficult for its enemies to see.

A Small Fish with a Big Appetite

The Black Ruby is a nimble little fish with an excellent appetite.

When you drop food into



the water, the Black Ruby is on the spot at once. It has already swallowed several worms by the time the other fish get there. It is probably due to the fact that it eats so much that it is such a fast swimmer.

Protective Stripes

This fish comes from Indonesia, from the island of Sumatra, and so is called the Sumatran Tiger Barb. There is a lot of sunshine in Sumatra, and it is easy to see shoals of Tiger Barbs in the clear water.



The Tiger Barb is yellow, with black stripes across its body. This colouring helps it to hide from its enemies. It goes down to the sand at the bottom and as it takes up a position among the stems of the weeds there, it merges with its surroundings.

The dark stems against the yellow sand look just like the stripes on the Tiger Barb's body.

Among the Bullrushes

This is an Angel Fish. Angel Fish live in the Amazon River, among the bullrushes. They grow thickly, and it is no easy task to get between their stems. But the Angel Fish swim freely in



and out, for their bodies are completely flat. They come out to play, but as soon as there is any sign of an enemy, back they dive into the rushes. Once there, they are as well-protected as though they were behind a fence; their enemy can see them, but cannot get through to them, and so he has to give up and go away hungry.

Underwater Coachmen

These fish are also flat, and they are round, like pancakes. They are called Discus Fish. Discus Fish make doting parents. While their young are still bad swimmers, they



help them along. For this purpose the young have special threads to attach them to the parent's body. When the mother is tired of carrying them, she swims up to the father and shakes them off. The young transfer to his body at once, as though to say "Your turn now!"

Tasty, But Not Enough

Among the green weeds just under the surface hide the Black Line Red Tail Pencils, a pretty fish with a black stripe along its body. It stands on its



tail for hours, watching the gnats. The air above the water is full of them, and an insect only has to brush the surface for a Pencil to be on the spot at once, to seize and swallow it. They are so tasty, you can never have enough.

The “Cleverest Fish of All”

The Headstander spends all its time on its head. This is the most convenient position for rummaging in the mud for worms. It is so used to this position that even when full stays in it. And so we joke that it is the “cleverest fish



of all”, because its head is so heavy that it weighs it down.

The Headstander encases its eggs in such a hard coating that the young are not always able to break through. Sometimes you see an egg in the aquarium with a baby fish struggling to get out, and getting nowhere. When this happens, take a needle and break through the egg to let out the baby.

A Rudder and Oars

This fish looks like an arrow, and swims as fast as an arrow in flight. Its fins are both a rudder and oars, and sometimes a brake as well. As soon as it wants to stop,



it fans them out and stops dead; its brakes are working. They often save its life. When chased by a predator, it dives into the weeds and stops dead there, while the enemy keeps going, puzzled by the disappearance of the Lyretail. And so it sets off in pursuit of some other fish.

Careful Parents

The Jewel Fish swim quietly and self-importantly around the aquarium. When the time comes to breed, they choose their spot, deposit their roe on a stone and stand guard over it,



letting no other fish come near. They leave their post only to eat. The father takes his turn, until the mother comes back, and so they stand guard day and night, like loving parents. Woe betide any fish which tries to harm their young; it gets such a thrashing that it will think twice before trying again.

Eggs in Safety

This fish has such a long name that it's hard to remember: it is called the *Pseudotropheus Auratus*, and it is a cunning little fish. It hides its roe in its mouth to save it from other fish, then shuts



its mouth tight for twelve days, not opening it even to eat. However thin and hungry it gets, it will not open its mouth. At this period it even grows a special pouch under its lower jaw to keep the roe. It doesn't mind going hungry if it can be sure that the roe is always there, so that the young will hatch out safe and sound.





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